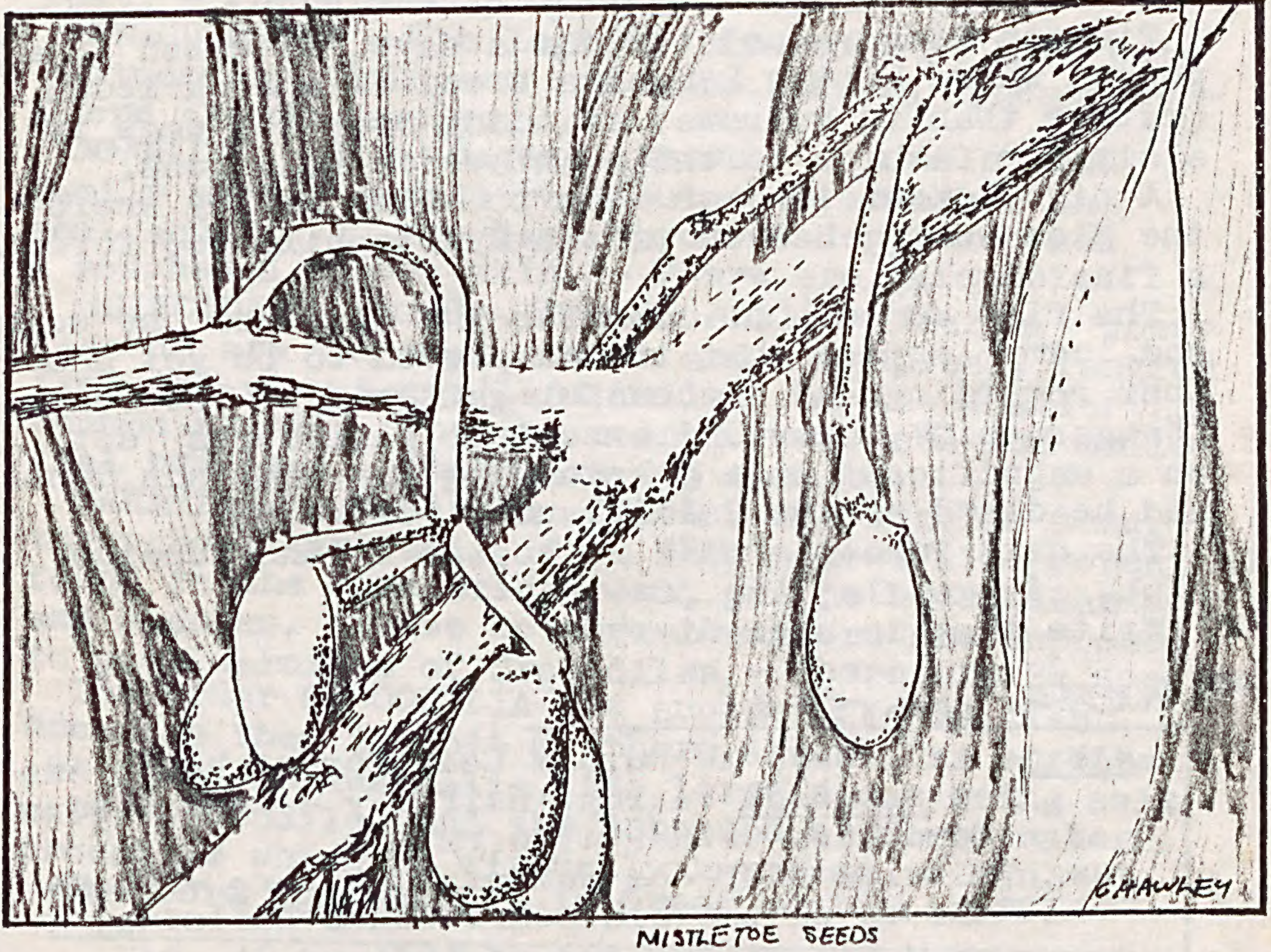
Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat

MAY 1985

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

Meeting	May 3	Dr. M. Calder - Mistletoes.
Meeting	June 7	Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture - Natural History Photography of the lat Stella Bedggood.- Mr. I. Pym.
Excursion	May 4	Durham Lead - Mr. G. Binns.
Excursion	June 9	Canadian - Mrs F. Williamson.

N.B. See additional notes - Page 2.



MISTLETOE SEEDS

President:	Miss H Burgess	312210
Secretary:	Miss J Binns	323670
Treasurer:	Mrs F Williamson	327631
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Meetings, as specified, are held in the Art Building of the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street South, Ballarat, commencing 7.30pm.

EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, Cnr. STURT and ARMSTRONG STREETS, BALLARAT, AT 9.30 am FOR FULL DAY OUTINGS, OR AT 1.30 pm FOR HALF DAY.

W.V.F.N.C.A. 'Campout' PRINCETOWN.

The Timboon F.N.C. hosted the Autumn meeting of the association on the weekend of April 19 - 21 with representatives of thirteen clubs in attendance.

An enjoyable programme of excursions had been organised to take advantage of the various habitats of the region. The Port Campbell National Park was explored, from The Bay of Islands to the mouth of the Gellibrand River. The Swamplands surrounding the Gellibrand and the Serpentine Creek junction proved an excellent area for viewing birds.

Some notable recordings were the sightings of two Australian Bitterns, Golden Headed Cisticola, Rufous Bristle Bird, Southern Emu- Wren, Black Faced Cormorant and very large parties of Swamphens.

Beach washed specimens of White Faced Storm Petrel were found.

Timboon Members pointed out a cave, situated in a gorge, where Little Penguins breed on a rock ledge (rather than in burrows) standing over the eggs in a similar fashion to their Antarctic relations.

A night excursion was made to Melba Gulley where the glow worms, Larvae of the Mycetophilidae, formed a fine display.

The five members of our Club who attended the weekend 'camp' agreed that it had proved to be yet another rewarding and successful gathering. The venue, "Kangaroobie", provided excellent facilities set on a magnificent site overlooking the wetlands, dunes and headland of the Gellibrand River Mouth.

The next function will be hosted by the Bendigo Club, at Axedale, Aug 30 - 31.

Write that in your diary!

PLEASE NOTE:

MAY 3	Excursion to Durham Lead forest block is a Saturday outing; half day - departing Crockers Corner 1.30 PM.
JUNE 7	Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture - Venue is to be the old Court House Building, S.M.B., at the end of Lydiard St. Sth. As this is our annual guest night, members are requested to assist by bringing a plate of supper.

LIZARDS.

Phylum - Chordata. Sub Phylum - Vertibrata.
Class - Reptilia (meaning to creep).

Our Guest Speaker at the April meeting was Mr. Greg. Parker from the Reptile Park. His subject was the Lizards of Victoria. Greg said he kept Lizards at a very early age and because he, is a Victorian he keeps, and is interested in Victorian Lizards. Greg was at one time in charge of the Reptile section at Healesville. There are 4000 species of Reptilia in the World, 11% of them are found in Australia. There are 70 species of Reptilia in Victoria.

Five families of Lizards are represented in Australia.

GECKONIDAE - (meaning imitative,)- Geckos are small, mostly nocturnal lizards with pads on their feet, - There are 75 species.

PYGOPODIDAE - The legless lizards that have only rudimentary limbs and are snakelike in appearance - There are 29 species.

AGAMIDAE - The dragon lizards. A wide spread family mostly terrestrial but some arboreal and semi aquatic. they have acrodont dentition and a roughened spiney skin, - There are 64 species.

SCINCIDAE - Skinks. Smooth scaled lizards. These lizards are the most common and widespread, ranging from the very large 'Land Mullet' to the smaller common skinks. They were once much used for medicinal purposes - There are 265 species.

VARANIDAE - Monitors. These large lizards occur throughout Australia, from the largest (the Berentie) found in the more arid areas, to the Lace Lizards and Goannas. These northern monitors are supposed to give warnings of Crocodiles. - There are 24 species.

The order CROCODILIA are another Lizard like creature they inhabit Northern Areas. Two species are found in Australia, the large ocean going salt water crocodile, and the Johnston or fresh water crocodile which is virtually harmless to Man.

The word KROKODEILOS in Greek means Lizard.

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Geckos have immovable eyes, a velvety skin and Juxtapose scales (side by side). They have specific tails fat or leaf shaped and adhesive pads on their toes with scalelike flaps for gripping; some can change colour. They will shed their tails like skinks and legless lizards. Geckos shed their skins as they grow; this is a quiet and fast process. they lay two or three eggs as they are oviparous, which means the young are hatched after the eggs are expelled from the body. Ovivivaparous means the eggs are hatched within the body and the young are born alive but without placental attachment. Viviparous means bringing forth live young as all mammals and some reptiles and fish do.

Legless lizards are like skinks, with light smooth scales and immovable eyelids, to keep them moist these lizards and others with immovable eyelids lick them. They are believed to be close relations to geckos.

Skinks are by far the largest genus of lizards. they are not only found in Australia. The scales are usually smooth and glossy. Most are diurnal.

Dragons have spiney loose skins and have depressed hind legs. Some are insectivorous, others eat herbage and small mammals, most are insectivorous.

Monitors have loose fitting skins and are constantly flicking out their forked tongues (these are the only species with forked tongues). They flatten their bodies to soak up the maximum of heat and raise their bodies from cold surfaces; they are active by day and are predators or scavengers.

All belong to the one single family VARANUS and are our largest lizards.

Lizards that rely on external sources for body heat are called ECTOTHERMS;they are in three categories.

Reptiles have been referred to as POIKILOTHERMS or animals whose body temperature closely follows that of the external temperature. The term cold blooded is misleading.

The majority of lizards are HELIOTHERMS which rely on radiant energy for their body heat.

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The final group are THIGMOTHERMS, non basking creatures that depend on heat exchange. Some geckos cling to the under side of bark for warmth and move as the bark cools.

In conclusion, a further note of interest concerning the ancestors of lizards is included.

The earliest fossil forms are from the Lower Triassic Period, about 180 million years ago. They are small primitive reptiles, somewhat lizard like in appearance.

One single lizard like remnant from the past, called the TUATARA, is found in New Zealand.

Excursion Notes April

To reinforce the information presented by Greg Parker during his informative talk at the monthly meeting, the morning session of the excursion on April 14 was spent at the Ballarat Reptile and Wild life Park, Fussel St, East Ballarat.

Members were treated to a most informative tour of the specimens on view at the Park by Greg, who was most generous with his time. His enthusiasm is undeniable and the reptiles are obviously carefully tended and in excellant condition. It was possible to make close examinations of a number of the dangerous snakes viz.

Copperhead, Common Black Snake, Common Death Adder, Western Brown Snake, Common Brown Snake, Common Tiger Snake, Taipan, and other snakes and lizards.

The estuarine Crocodiles displayed remarkable agility in taking their food.

Display facilities in the reptile house provide very clear views of the specimens.

The high winds and showers of the morning abated sufficiently for our party to proceed to the Canadien Forest Block for lunch and a brief survey of several sections. Although a Scarlet Robin had been observed at the Reptile Park there was little movement in the forest and more attention was paid to a search for Autumn flowering orchids. Four species were found - Parsons Bands and Hyacinth Orchids (the latter a late "stayer"), and two Greenhoods, Parvaflora and Longifolia.

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Three leptospermum species were examined in the southern section of the block - L. Juniperinum, L. mersinoides and L. phylicoides (an unusual occurrance of a species common in Gippsland). Of interest were a very large Koala in a E. aromaphloia (scent bark), and a solitary Forktailed Swift.

G.W.B.

Reports, April meeting.

Several reports and comments on Wallabies were made:

F. Williamson - A Wallaby in her Liger St. garden.
Helen Burgess - Has had reports of Wallabies Black Hill lookout.
Greg. Parker - Numerous reports of Wallabies in suburban Streets East Ballarat.
Bill Murphey - A Busker in the Bourke St. Mall (Melbourne City) reported a Nankeen Kestrel flying overhead at the same time each day!
Lyndsay Fink - Sugar Glider brought in by a cat in Scotsburn.

TO MUNGO AND WILLANDRA NATIONAL PARKS

By RACV EXPLORER TOUR - Gretl Manguss

When Helen invited me to take part in this tour I was very happy to get this opportunity. Thank you Helen.

After considerable worries about taking as little as possible and still packing everything necessary to be self-sufficient, we finally headed towards Mildura. A brief stop at the Hattah National Park and Lakes revealed to us their absolute beauty.

Late afternoon (we were booked into the Apex Caravanpark, Mildura), we pitched our tent and, shortly after, the tour was christened with a 20 minute heavy downpour, hail and thunder. Luckily it passed as quickly as it came and next morning we left in clear sunshine at 8.30 am. for Pooncarie. It is not the shortest way to Mungo Park, but it is an Explorer Tour, so what!

Driving east of Pooncarie, it led us straight into the arid outback - endless flat, uninhabited, treeless, saltbush country. We were 29 motorvehicles and only one had a flat tyre which was replaced in no time by the helpful RACV crew.

To avoid too much "dust in the eyes" we kept a good distance apart, just follow the dustcloud on the horizon! Distance meant really nothing. Turning from Springhill (where is the hill?) south did not alter the landscape for another 90 km. We had so far left 170 km. behind us.

Then, suddenly the "Walls of China" emerged on the horizon as a white blur, distinctively rising above the vegetation of the dry Mungo Lake bed, not unlike some form of ancient battlement. But yet we made a righthand turn away to the camping ground, 10 km. to the west of the "Walls". Surprise! There were some shady trees but nothing else except a couple of little houses - you know: keep Australia beautiful! Fighting flies, ants and heat we put up the tent. Overcoming a few hitches, we settled down. It was a lovely, lonely, away from it all spot, overlooking the Mungo dry lake bed in the distant, white, shimmer of the "Walls".

Next morning, with a glorious hot day ahead, a 15 minutes drive and we faced the extraordinary feature. It was not a vertical wall as we expected, more a wide one, horizontal spread, consisting of huge layers of quartz-sand, well developed layers of soil and saline sandy clay, deposited through various changes of the waterlevel between 40,000 and 15,000 years ago. These deposited sand dunes are called lunettes. Different aspects and colouring with some sharp lines indicated several eroding gullies.

I must explain first that Mungo Lake belongs to a chain of other dry lakes, stretching 60 km. north to "Gol Gol", the so-called Willandra Lake System. These lakes were all filled with water from the Willandra creek (a tributory of the Lachlan River) during the last period of glacial activity 45,000 BC. They dried out about 15,000 years ago.

The erosions of the 'lunettes (Chinese labourers gave them the name of "Walls of China", to remember their home country), lead to some exciting archaeological finds. In 1969 the big breakthrough came with the rare finds of 2 skeletons.

Carbon dating tests revealed that one lived around 25,000 years ago and the other one 30,000 BC. - Animal remains and other archaeological evidence have all been well-preserved over long periods in the Lake Mungo lunettes. These relics helped to establish the general lifestyles of the early inhabitants. They showed that the Aborigines' diet included golden perch, Macquarie perch, Murray cod, shellfish, Emu eggs, Wallabies and rat kangaroos. Most of this evidence occurs as fragments in Aboriginal campfires and middens. Our guide showed us one of those campfire sites on the lunettes. When the lake dried up, the Aborigines depended more on food products derived from seedgrinding. Large grinding dishes have been found.

Stone artifacts, and the remains of animals now extinct (eg.Procoptodon galiah - a giant short-faced kangaroo) have also been uncovered at Mungo. The most numerous animal remains found belonged to hairy nose wombats and bettongs (small wallabies).

In the new visitor display are a few life-sized copies of these animals exhibited. Also Tasmanian Tigers and Devils fragments have been uncovered.

Evidence of a near reversal of the earth's magnetic field about 30,000 years ago was found in the area. As time and scientific investigation at Mungo continues, more such ancient secrets will be uncovered and will help us better to understand Aboriginal cultures and environments of the past.

The more recent history of Mungo as sheepstation reads:

Prior to 1922 the area known as Mungo National Park was in excess of 203,000 ha. The Mungo Woolshed, which is open to public inspection is an important relic of the past. Chinese labourers built it in 1869 from locally pit-sawn and adzed (Murray) pine logs. The shed was used to shear up to 50,000 sheep in a single season. In order to achieve this tally, thirty shearers were employed, but later when steam-powered shearing equipment was installed only 18 were employed. It was interesting to read that the last used super powered engine came from Ronaldson and Tippett.

to be continued!